

Rice via Aadhaar fingerprints

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Ranchi, Jan. 22: Chief minister Hemant Soren today launched the much-awaited Aadhaar-linked public distribution system (PDS) from Ormanjhi block of Ranchi district in a bid to efficiently implement Food Security Act and curb large-scale graft that has become synonymous with subsidised foodgrain distribution.

Under the system, the biometric identity of each beneficiary will be authenticated at each PDS store, forcing dealers to give foodgrain to the actual person instead of fudging manual records and selling the commodity in the open market.

Aadhaar numbers of beneficiaries are stored in a central database of food and civil supplies department, while each PDS shop will have a server and each dealer a handheld biometric device to authenticate the identity of the beneficiary by fingerprint-matching.

To help illiterate beneficiaries, the handheld device will have recorded messages in Hindi to guide them through the authentication process, telling them when to press their fingerprint, for instance.

But, another major loophole, that of PDS dealers distributing less grain by weight than what is mandated under central and state welfare schemes, won't be addressed for now.

Unscrupulous dealers often cheat on weight, a fact that emerged most shockingly

Smart idea to verify ID, weighty loophole stays



Chief minister Hemant Soren helps villager Lalku Mahli to authenticate his identity on the handheld biometric device at Ormanjhi in Ranchi on Wednesday. Picture by Prashant Mitra

when Hazaribagh district resident Mosamat Geeta (40) and her Sangeeta (12) died of starvation last year and neighbours alleged they got around 20kg of grain from their

ration store.

Major schemes include Antyodaya Anna Yojana where the poorest of the poor get 35kg rice or wheat at Rs 3 and Rs 2 per kilo and BPL scheme

where the quantity of grain is same, but rates are Rs 7 per kilo of rice and Rs 6.50 per kilo of wheat. Then, there is Annapurna Yojana where senior citizens get 10kg of rice or

wheat for free.

Jharkhand, however, subsidises Antyodaya and BPL schemes at Re 1 per kilo.

Each PDS or ration store is supposed to sell subsidised

rice, wheat, sugar, salt and kerosene. But sugar is absent in Jharkhand's PDS stores for months now.

"We get a lot of complaints that beneficiaries don't get PDS allotments and middlemen are involved in irregularities. The new system will ensure that the genuine beneficiary gets his PDS allotments. We have launched the new system in Ormanjhi block and will slowly expand its ambit across the state," Hemant said in his address.

But Hemant did not give a deadline about when the new system would cover the entire state, probably because large tracts don't have electricity and computerisation poses a challenge.

"The new system will transform PDS into an efficient and transparent one. Now, the beneficiary can avail his grain allotment from any dealer across the state through Aadhaar. It gives him or her flexibility of choice," chief secretary R.S. Sharma, the driving force behind the system, said.

It means that if a beneficiary suspects one dealer is fudging weights, he can now go to another.

"Around 91 per cent people in Jharkhand have Aadhaar numbers. So, implementation of Aadhaar-linked PDS won't be difficult. If glitches crop up, the entire administration will be engaged to fix them. We will make the new system work and present a model for the country on efficient PDS through technology," Sharma said.

Paramedics can smile now

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Ranchi, Jan. 22: The state cabinet today approved service regulations for paramedical staff to pave the way for regularising services of contractual staff, ending a two-year-long impasse on the issue.

There are over 1,347 contractual paramedical staff who have been working against sanctioned posts for several years in hospitals across the state.

On January 6, they went on strike for around 10 days demanding regularisation of services. The strike was called off after the state government gave them positive assurances.

"Their services could not be regularised in the absence of service regulations. Now that service regulations have been approved by the state government, the services of such paramedical staff, who fulfil the requisite conditions, will be regularised," said cabinet coordination department principal secretary J.B. Tubid at a news conference.



Hemant Soren checks a device during the launch of aadhaar-linked biometric PDS at Ormanjhi in Ranchi on Wednesday. (Prashant Mitra)

He pointed out that the service of contractual doctors had also been regularised in similar fashion earlier.

Hospital

The cabinet also agreed to transfer 2.80 acre municipal corporation land in the Ghaghra locality in the outskirts of the state capital for setting up a super-speciality hospital on public private partnership.

The land will be leased to a

private partner — not yet chosen — for 30 years.

PP bids

Bid documents for running the proposed 500-bed new building on Ranchi Sadar hospital premises on PPP mode was also approved by the cabinet.

Transaction adviser International Finance Corporation has been authorised to float tenders for selecting a private partner.

Mukhiyas

In a step forward to strengthen elected panchayat institutions, the cabinet decided that no confidence motions could not be brought against elected mukhiyas. However, an appellate authority would soon be constituted to hear complaints against mukhiyas.

Lokayukta

The cabinet also decide to empower the Lokayukta to probe alleged acts of omission and commission in municipal bodies.

Funds

Rs 776.34 crore was approved

for various schemes under Rajeev Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan, another Rs 150 crore would be given to the gram panchayats from the state plan for construction of PCC roads in villages.

Judicial posts

Nine posts of judges and judicial officers of various ranks were sanctioned for Khunti district.

Till now, judicial affairs in the district were being headed by a chief judicial magistrate rank official.

Tax tribunal

Lohardagga's principal district and session judge P.D. Choudhary has been named chief of commercial taxes tribunal.

Other important cabinet decisions included:

- Approval of Jharkhand Tribal Advisory Council Regulations
- Maintenance of records of mortgaged immovable property at district headquarters
- Transfer of land for various projects.